

Memorandum

To: Paul DeCamp, AICP
Planning Director, Augusta-Richmond Planning Commission

From: Rolanda Daniel
Timothy Preece, AICP

Date: April 19, 2004

Re: April 2004 Public Meetings, Augusta Regional Transportation Study (ARTS) Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Update

This memorandum summarizes the first round of public meetings for the Augusta Regional Transportation Study (ARTS) Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP) Update 2004. The meetings were held on Monday, April 12th and Tuesday, April 13th in three different locations within the study area. The intent of the meetings was to educate the public on the planning process for this study, as well as solicit input on transportation issues and concerns. The format for the meetings included an open house, a formal presentation, and a question and answer session.

During the open house, members of the Project Team were on hand to answer questions from attendees as they viewed displays of study area information. Display boards were presented during the open house portion of the meeting to illustrate the distribution of land uses over time, and population and employment growth within the Augusta-Richmond region. In addition, displays were viewed that specifically addressed transportation related concerns including traffic volumes in key areas and high accident locations. One of the displays included an exercise that allowed citizens to select three needs they felt were priorities for the study area. Participants were given colored dots to indicate their preferences. Smaller versions of the display boards and the results of the interactive exercise are provided in Appendix A.

The meetings began with an introduction and welcome from Paul DeCamp, Planning Director for the Augusta-Richmond Planning Commission. He explained that the purpose of this meeting was to discuss efforts currently being undertaken to revise the plan and gain input from the public on major transportation needs and issues to be addressed. Tim Preece, Consultant Project Manager, conducted a presentation detailing efforts to update the Plan. This study process, anticipated for completed in October 2004, consists of collecting and analyzing baseline transportation data, an extensive public involvement program, and identification of immediate and long-term transportation needs and solutions. A number of public outreach methods, highlighted during the presentation, will take place throughout the study process. These methods include but are not limited to public meetings, community events, and the study's webpage. Handouts distributed during the meeting included a:

- Meeting Agenda
- PowerPoint Presentation
- Study Newsletter
- Comment Sheet

Graphic displays viewed during the open house included the:

- Study Area Map
- Existing and Future Land Use Patterns
- Existing and Future Population
- Existing and Future Employment
- Top 20 Traffic Accident Locations
- Traffic Counts
- Currently Planned Projects
- Interactive Exercise

Following the presentation, a question and answer session was provided. In addition to this comment period, the public was asked to submit further questions and statements on comment forms. A list of verbal and written comments expressed during the meeting is attached as Appendix B.

Input received through the meetings will be used to:

- 1) ensure the Plan's goals and objectives reflect citizen issues;
- 2) provide a guide to the study team as to the 3 issues that need to be evaluated; and
- 3) provide elected officials a summary of what the project team has heard from citizens regarding transportation issues and nee

Verbal and Written Comments

Verbal Comments

During the question and answer period, many attendees were interested in the study process and funding availability. Questions (Q), answers (A), and comments (C), are included below.

Monday, April 12

Evans Government Center (Columbia County)

5:30 – 7:30 PM

Q: Will there be a connection from Augusta to other major Cities such as Atlanta, Savannah and surrounding Port Cities?

A: The state has possible connections being addressed, with implementation potentially being included in the Governors Roadway Improvement Plan (GRIP).

A: The focus of this Plan is within the Augusta region.

Q: What are other major transportation/transit issues (question from team to citizens)?

A: Lack of Choices. The communities don't have sidewalks that citizens can use. There are minimal choices to get from point A to point B. Would like to see more transit as well as bike and pedestrian options.

A: More options for paratransit riders. The current system only allows them to ride at certain times. Possibly, open up the schedule so that the buses travel more regularly. Also, create wheelchair accessible sidewalks.

Q: The section of Washington Road from Fury's Ferry to William Few Parkway is constantly congested. There are three schools (greenbrier) on one two-lane road with only one traffic light. Is there a plan to alleviate the congestion and extend the road by Greenbrier from Hardy -McManus.

A: The extension was proposed, but is not as great a concern as the congestion on William Few and Washington Road.

Q: Should Columbia County be looking at starting roadway improvement projects now to meet the needs of the future?

A: It will take \$300 million to complete all projects in the current plan. The County Plan will be incorporated into the regional plan. The draft transportation plan is scheduled to be presented to the board later this year.

Tuesday, April 13
Aiken Municipal Building
11:30 AM – 1:30 PM

Q: Who is URS and what is their involvement in the process?

A: URS is an engineering consulting firm hired to assist the Augusta-Richmond Planning Commission in updating their transportation plan. My colleagues and I work in the planning department and specialize in transportation projects.

Q: How will URS project population and employment for the area? What are your techniques for research?

A: We gather our information from the US Census Bureau and other sources such as the University of Georgia's Department of Economic Forecasts. We will utilize this information in a forecasting model to predict population and employment growth for the year 2030.

Q: How will this project address environmental concerns?

A: Environmental concerns are addressed in two different areas. First, we will look at environmental issues that impact future growth. These issues will be presented to ARTS and the local counties. Secondly, environmental concerns associated with this Plan Update such as air quality, have been included in the goals and objectives. We will strategize with local planning partners to ensure environmental concerns are included in the Plan Update and that solutions are provided.

Q: Once projects are identified, how are they prioritized and scheduled?

A: The project team will first recommend projects to be included in the Plan Update based on identified needs. The team will identify costs associated with each project and a schedule based on available funding sources. Local officials working through the ARTS committees will finalize the schedule and those priorities.

Q: Realistically, how fast can the study be completed?

A: We are scheduled to give our recommendations to the planning commission in the fall. We will take the current projects and evaluate which ones will stay and which ones will be adjusted. We will also add projects. The Plan will be adopted in December 2004.

Q: What is ARTS exactly?

A: ARTS is the Augusta-Richmond Transportation Study (ARTS). ARTS is the transportation process established for the Augusta-Richmond region. We are working with the Planning Commission throughout the study process. The planning commission is a collective of 3 major committees. These committees are:

Policy Committee is made up of elected officials. They are responsible for the yearly update of the short-term projects that are pulled from the long-range study. This committee makes the final decisions.

Citizens Advisory Committee is composed of citizens that live in the metropolitan planning area.

Technical Coordinating Committee is composed of planning partners that assist the planning commission with technical efforts.

Q: Which elected officials are a part of the Policy Committee?

A: Mayors of Aiken, Vernontown, Augusta, and Grovetown. Other members of the committee include representatives from South Carolina and Georgia DOT's, FHWA, Chair of Columbia County Commission, and FTA.

Q: What do we know about the reauthorization of TEA-21, which is working it's way through Congress?

A: The reauthorization of TEA-21 is currently being reviewed by Congress. There are two primary versions, and each proposes higher funding levels than the President will likely approve. We are tracking this issue closely.

Q: Will that affect the planning requirements?

A: As of right now, we are assuming that there will not be many changes, business as usual.

Q: A lot of variables are involved in the socioeconomic data for a model. The model is what gives us the information needed for analysis at a local level. Can it be analyzed at a city or street level?

A: We have to be careful of how specific we ask the model to be. The model is best at a larger level rather than a smaller level. It is hard to get the model to run at the micro-level to better accuracy.

Q: Can we do the model run only for Aiken with different criteria?

A: Yes. When the results are presented it will be with Aiken County data and Aiken County streets. If there are certain streets that we should analyze, please let us know.

Q: Are the models that are being run already completed by the DOTs?

A: No. Models are project specific and are updated constantly. The model is currently being updated with the most current data. Local officials and technical advisory committees will review results of the model output.

Q: What model is used for future congestion levels?

A: We look at the travel demand model run at a great level and extract out areas of concern. We then use other techniques to analyze those areas more specifically.

Q: Are we using a subset of models from the DOTs?









A: No, just for the Augusta- Richmond area for the ARTS.

Q: What year are we projecting to?

A: We project out to the year 2030, but will also run the model for years 2005, 2010, and 2020, for accuracy purposes. We will ask the DOTs to do that for us.

WHAT'S MOST IMPORTANT TO YOU?

Place a dot by three transportation related concerns that are most important to you.

CATEGORIES		SELECTIONS
Mobility		● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● (9)
Economic Development		● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● (15)
Environmental Impacts		● ● ● ● ● (5)
Roadway Improvements		● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● (12)
Safety	 	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● (10)
Transportation Options (Public Transit, Biking, Walking)	 	● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● ● (17)

● Columbia County ● Aiken County ● Augusta-Richmond County

Tuesday, April 13
Augusta Civic Center
5:30 – 7:30 PM

Q: Are the majority of SPLOST projects in the current plan?

A: Some of the projects are included, but not all.

Q: Will there be upgrades to the local current transit system?

A: We will be looking at the current system to see if there are issues that can be improved in the August Public Transit system. Some corridors may be looked at on a closer level to improve service efficiency. We can also look at signal preemption.

A: The congestion management system is set-up to look at the transit system and see what links can be improved for riders.

Q: How much money is to be spent over the 30-year plan?

A: Probably \$600-\$700 million over the next 30 years.

C: We find that there is a lack of funding for restriping roads for pedestrian and bicycle use. As well as upgrading safety issues for existing roads (crosswalks, bike lanes, sidewalks)

C: We will take this into account when identifying projects for the Plan Update.

Q: What is the status of the Bobby Jones and Windsor Spring connector?

A: Windsor Spring is currently in the conception stage.

Q: What about the Bobby Jones/ I-520 interchange?

A: Right-of-way plans have been approved, and rights-of-way will be acquired next.

Q: Are there improvements to be made the bridge over I-20?

A: It is included as part of the Davis Rd. widening.

Q: Closen Road and Steven's Creek?

A: That is a local project. Please contact the Public Works Department.

Written Comments

C: We need more transportation choices-sidewalks and bike paths-don't force us into our cars to go one mile.

C: Gibbs at Washington needs a light.

C: Look at widening Columbia Industrial Boulevard off of N. Belair Road.

C: Transportation for individuals with physical disabilities that can't drive.

C: Wheelchair cuts in sidewalks-more sidewalks.

C: Please work on Target shopping center area, Davis Road, and Wheeler Road area for better flow especially at high traffic times.

C: Our office has received inquiries concerning traffic problems on the Washington Road and William Few Parkway area because of congestion caused by traffic to and from Greenbriar High School.

Q: Is there a projected plan to add roads in the Greenbriar school area to alleviate the traffic congestion on Washington Road/William Few Parkway during weekday mornings and afternoons?

C: Connectivity to major cities.

C: This meeting could have been better announced. Encourage more public participation. Suggest next time a brief newspaper article announcing and describing it.

C: Relationship of new and improved roads and sprawl.

C: It is still early in the process – as more information and data become available, more meetings/information dissemination will be necessary.

C: Connectivity of arterials and collectors to reduce trip length and current and future congestion.

C: I am most concerned [t]hat the environment is not a big concern now because it has a very natural setting. The horror of smog does not exist yet.

Q: How much deforestation will take place to complete this project (give a percentage)?

C: Too much wasted paper.

C: Concerned with Whiskey to Silver Bluff Road.

Q: Can I be alerted by this department of future meetings?

C: ARTS is very auto-oriented. Need to develop (not just review/study) alternative modes of transportation.

C: I would like to see Windsor Spring completed at the earliest possible